Making the Grade: Examining the Racial Awareness of White Preservice Teachers at Illinois

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Abstract

This study explored the racial awareness of White preservice teachers and investigated the reasons why many feel apprehensive about teaching racial minority students. Participants were two White, female preservice teachers who were seniors in the Elementary Education Program at Illinois. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and focused on strengths and uncertainties in teaching racially diverse students. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and ideas. Results indicated the presence of racial color blindness among the participants, and several recurring themes developed pertaining to the structure and pervasiveness of diversity related coursework, as well as anticipated challenges and considerations in choosing where to begin their teaching careers.

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Beginning after the Civil Rights Movement and taking root more notably in the 1970s, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) realized that teacher education programs needed to be concerned with the level of multicultural competency being achieved by individuals heading into teaching careers (James, 1978; Trent, 2008). As the United States becomes increasingly diversified, it is predicted that by 2020 nearly half of K-12 students will be students of color (Banks, 1999; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989), while approximately 87% of teachers currently remain White or European American (Frankenberg, 2006). In California, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, and Texas, the percentage of students of color already has exceeded 50% (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). These figures would not be quite as problematic if teacher education programs incorporated more comprehensive diversity training, but statistics show that both new and veteran teachers report feeling unprepared to teach a diverse group of students (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).

This imbalance between the racial composition of the nation's teachers versus that of its students is reason for concern, as various consequences can arise in diverse classrooms in which teachers are unable to understand and empathize with their students and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. Fortunately, universities such as Illinois are beginning to recognize the racial imbalance within preservice teacher programs and are working toward recruiting a more diverse group of students. In the meantime however, problems surface in the classroom in the form of unreasonably low expectations for racial minority students, stricter discipline, inappropriate blame placed on home environments, and unequal assignment of racial minority students to special education classes (Gay, 2002; Irvine, 1990). Needless to say, these

troublesome occurrences increase the likelihood of lower achievement among racial minority students, and perpetuate the system of inequalities that continues to exist between White and non-White individuals in our society. Widening this gap even further are teacher shortages and high turnover rates; after teaching for five years, 46% of teachers leave the profession, and this rate is almost 50% greater in high poverty districts found in urban regions (Ingersoll, 2002). When you combine lower wages and increased levels of disappointment and frustration with many White teachers' lack of multicultural competency, the result is that few well-qualified teachers pursue careers in disadvantaged urban schools. Though working to promote racial diversity in teacher education programs is an important step to take, the currently high percentage of White teachers makes it essential that we study the kind of training they are receiving and their level of racial awareness when entering their own classroom. Previous research has demonstrated two important areas of influence, which include both the teacher education programs and the personal experiences and beliefs that preservice teachers bring with them.

Effectiveness of Teacher Education Programs in Promoting Racial Awareness

In working to resolve the obstacles that teachers face in the classroom, it is not that surprising that researchers often focus in on the perceived source of the problem, conducting large amounts of qualitative research on whether or not teacher education programs are effectively preparing preservice teachers for their future careers. Considering the number of White students who graduate from these programs feeling inadequately equipped to go into racially diverse classrooms, it is hard to argue that there is nothing that can be done by colleges and universities to address this issue. To add support to this claim, numerous studies have examined the beliefs held by White preservice teachers before and after completing courses on diversity and working with diverse student populations (Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Clark et al., 1996; Cockrell et al., 1999; Horton & Scott, 2004;

Milner, 2006; Milner et al., 2003; Téllez, 2008). Time and time again, these studies demonstrate that courses and diverse teaching and mentoring experiences can lead to increased levels of racial awareness and understanding. What often prevents White preservice teachers from getting the most out of their program is the tendency to think of diversity as a problem that they will encounter throughout their career, instead of viewing it as a resource that can strengthen and enlighten the lives of themselves and their students (Taylor & Sobel, 2001; Zeichner, 1993). This is a barrier that teacher education programs must work to overcome so that White preservice teachers can understand the importance of becoming multiculturally competent.

One way that teacher education programs seem to fall short is in the amount of time invested in diversity courses. Though studies on their effectiveness brings forth positive results, many researchers make note of the fact that one or two semesters is not a sufficient amount of time for students to make important, permanent connections between what they are learning and how it affects them personally and professionally (Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Cockrell et al., 1999; Horton & Scott, 2004; Milner et al., 2003). One suggestion for how to help resolve this problem is to more thoroughly incorporate diversity topics into all of the courses that preservice teachers are required to take (Furman, 2008; Milner et al., 2003). Not only would this provide more time for students to develop their views on racial diversity, but it would also send out a clear message that the college or university is strongly committed to training multiculturally competent teachers. Dee and Henkin (2002) stress the idea that cultural competency should become a part of every program's mission statement and should be incorporated into the program's assessment process as well.

Researchers note that real world experience is another critical component of teacher education programs, but that the positive effects of working with racially diverse student populations also are limited by the lack of time often committed to such opportunities (Bell,

Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Milner et al., 2003). Bell, Horn, and Roxas (2007) demonstrated that White preservice teachers who had close interactions with students from racially diverse backgrounds were nearly three times more likely to reach a higher level of racial awareness and understanding than those who had worked with students on a less personal level. Spanierman et al. (in press) developed the Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS) to assess multicultural teaching competence in accordance with Sue et al.'s (1982) tripartite model of multicultural competence, which includes awareness, knowledge, and skills. Interestingly, the results of the study indicated that the scale was a good measure of both knowledge and skills, but did not significantly reflect multicultural self-awareness. Though this may indicate that quantitative measures cannot always capture the complexity of such a topic, it is important that research continues to examine whether preservice teacher programs are adequately promoting multicultural awareness among those who will be responsible for teaching children in racially diverse communities.

Effect of Personal Beliefs and Dispositions on the Racial Awareness of Preservice Teachers

It is important to note, however, that the structure and effectiveness of teacher education programs is not the only obstacle preventing White teachers from having the knowledge and confidence necessary to better connect with students from diverse racial backgrounds. While it is important to examine the thoughts and reflections of preservice teachers as they take diversity courses and get involved in new cultural experiences, researchers also emphasize the importance of investigating the personal differences that set individuals apart and leave only some prepared to face racial diversity in the classroom (Case & Hemmings, 2005; Dee & Henken, 2002; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Marshall, 1996; Ng, 2006; Pope & Wilder, 2005; Spanierman et al., in press; Stanley, 1996; Van Hook, 2002). Dee and Henken (2002) assessed 150 racially diverse preservice teachers using Stanley's (1996) Pluralism and Diversity Attitude Assessment (PADAA) and

examined five different factors: Implement Diversity, Equity Beliefs, Comfort with Diversity, Social Value of Diversity, and Assimilation. Results demonstrated that students' scores on the scale were equated with the kinds of racial experiences they had within their neighborhood, with coworkers and friends, their age, and their area of teaching. The connection between racially segregated personal experiences and narrow views on race and diversity creates an added obstacle for White preservice teachers, as it has been noted that for many White college students, entering a university is the first time they have sustained contact with individuals from diverse racial backgrounds (Chesler, Peet, & Sevig, 2003) Dee and Henken (2002) noted that teachers need to be willing and encouraged to step outside of their comfort zone if teacher education programs are really going to take root and have an effect on their approach to teaching.

Van Hook (2002), taking a strictly qualitative approach in examining preservice teachers' personal beliefs and dispositions, saw four different themes emerge after conducting interviews with 68 preservice teachers. These themes included Difficulty Discussing Sensitive Topics (16%), Difficulty Implementing Diversity Curriculum (21%), Policies and Practices Detrimental to Diversity (29%), and Inability to Recognize and Accept Diversity (88%). Because of the rich data provided through qualitative methods, Van Hook (2002) was able to further break down these themes, finding that sensitivity to the topics, constraints (time, financial, governmental), and lack of awareness/concern throughout society all affected preservice teachers' perceived ability to manage racially diverse classrooms and incorporate related techniques and lessons into their teaching. Interestingly, 63% also noted that parental opposition would pose a significant threat to their ability to integrate their classroom more thoroughly. Van Hook (2002) noted that it is important for teacher educators to be aware of these barriers so that they can be adequately addressed throughout teacher education programs. Individual differences also affect the extent to which students value diversity in the first place (Pope & Wilder, 2005), making for yet another

influence that teacher educators need to be aware of and prepared to work with. It is important that further research investigate whether instructors in preservice teaching programs are connected to the needs, interests, and backgrounds of their students in order to ensure that they are teaching coursework in a way that does not lead to boredom, fatigue, or frustration.

The Present Investigation

Almost all of the researchers that have been cited stress the need for additional studies that explore the obstacles preventing increased multicultural competence. While results such as Milner et al.'s (2003) use of the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory appear to note that preservice teachers have developed greater sensitivity toward racial diversity than existed over a decade ago, it is arguable whether this change simply reflects a change in our society's efforts to be more aware and "politically correct." In reviewing the literature, what is far more evident is that the United States has failed to make the kind of progress that one would expect since the issue of racial diversity became significant several decades ago (Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008). Especially due to the complexity of the topic, it is crucial that we continue to study the multicultural competence of White teachers as they go on to teach diverse classrooms. Those who are racially unaware and unprepared pose a threat to the education of racially diverse students across the country, and more harm than good can come from a teacher who inappropriately responds to the struggles and misbehaviors of the racial minority students in her or his classroom (Gay, 2002; Irvine, 1990). In order to eliminate this danger, it is essential that we utilize both quantitative and qualitative measures to examine the beliefs and attitudes of White preservice teachers so that we can better understand the factors that shape their views. Without better prepared teachers, turnover rates will remain high and urban schools will continue to suffer from a shortage of well-qualified teachers. Teacher educators, mentors, and teachers themselves must all become aware of the importance of multicultural competence and the barriers that block the

path to getting there; only then can changes be made to the programs and experiences that preservice teachers are provided.

Building upon the existing research, the present study investigated the factors that influence White preservice teachers' attitudes, understanding, and experiences regarding racial diversity. Using a qualitative method design, participants from Illinois' Elementary Education Program were asked to talk about their views on how racial diversity and their own identity as White teachers would affect their career decisions and the way they structure and run their own classroom. The interview questions were designed to obtain information about how the life experiences, characteristics, and coursework of White preservice teachers influenced their level of awareness, concern, and preparedness for working in racially diverse classrooms. It is important that we conduct research such as this because gaining feedback from the preservice teachers themselves is essential to determining where change must occur in education programs. Without this change, we cannot ensure that White preservice teachers are learning about the sociocultural implications of race and are leaving college prepared with the awareness and motivation necessary to teach in racially diverse communities.

Method

The participants in this study were two White female preservice teachers who I will refer to as Jane and Erica in order to protect their confidentiality. Both were seniors in the Elementary Education Program at Illinois and grew up in suburban to slightly more rural regions of the state, planning to begin their teaching careers right after graduation. The participants were recruited through mutual friends who recommended them for my study. At the end of each interview, each participant received a small snack as compensation for their time. Each semi-structured interview was conducted face-to-face in a private location and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview questions focused on each participant's classroom experience, plans for their future

teaching careers, and their strengths and uncertainties in teaching racially diverse students (see Appendix A). The questions were developed after completing a thorough review of the literature on Whiteness and preservice teachers and consulting with colleagues and professionals in the field. Each interview was audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim, removing all identifying information and using thematic analysis to identify key themes and ideas.

Considering the nature of this qualitative study, it was important for me to take into consideration my own identity as the researcher. I am a White female undergraduate student majoring in Psychology at the University of Illinois, and I am completing my senior year with plans to attend graduate school for School Psychology. Although my enrollment in an ethnography course on Whiteness and the University provided me with an opportunity to deeply examine my privileges and biases as a White individual, I recognized that my identity would still shape the way participants responded to me, the way I asked leading and follow up questions, and my ability to conduct thematic analysis on the transcriptions. I went into the study expecting to find that White preservice teachers lacked the kind of racial awareness necessary in understanding the influence of their own White privilege and the implications of race on a societal level, but worked toward maintaining an open mind by consulting my professor and colleagues for help in minimizing the influence of personal bias in my study.

Results

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews verbatim, I printed each of them out and read through them line by line, underlining words, sentences, or passages that revealed something about the participants' experiences or thoughts related to racial diversity. I used three different colored pens to differentiate between significant background information on the participants, references to personal experiences related to race, and direct comments revealing specific views and opinions.

In my second reading of each interview, I made written notes about recurring terminology, beliefs, and emotions, and determined which of the themes were present in both interviews. My findings focus primarily on themes that surfaced among both participants, but additional insight was gained through individual responses.

Findings

The findings of this study can most broadly be broken down into two categories by examining the way in which race has been incorporated into participants' coursework and teaching experiences at Illinois, and by looking at how race influences participants' preparedness and goals for the future. To begin, I had each participant tell me a little about their background interests in teaching and where they plan to teach when they graduate, and found an acknowledgment of race and a possible tie between better teaching experiences and less racial diversity. Although the only mention of race in my introductory questions was in asking, "What school are you teaching at? Could you tell me a little about the students (age, gender, racial background, etc.)?" both participants elaborated on race by discussing the racial breakdown of the classroom they were student teaching at. While Jane very comfortably laughed at the fact that the town she teaches in is about "99% White" with only a single Hispanic student in her class, Erica downplayed any effects of her student teaching in a racially diverse school, describing it as a "cool environment because [the students are] all really used to [being around students of different races]…it's not really an issue because they've just grown up that way. It's very respectful of differences and diversity." Interestingly, Jane did not note any difficulties or dislikes about her experience, and in fact explained that student teaching there had alleviated much of the prejudice she had previously held against working in rural schools, stating that there were "a lot of advantages to it that I didn't think of before or really knew of before." In contrast, Erica, who was student teaching in a more racially diverse classroom, noted that she was hesitant to continue

teaching in Champaign "because—and this is sad to say—but from my experience this semester…being a new teacher and having to deal with the discipline issues and just so much."

When I proceeded to ask each participant if they had considered how their personal identity, such as their gender or race, may influence their effectiveness as a teacher, both noted their Whiteness as a factor but continued to downplay its effects and deny any power differential. Jane responded by immediately saying, "I really wish I wasn't a White female because I'm definitely in the majority of teachers, you know? It's like 99% of teachers look exactly like me." Instead of going on to discuss issues of White power and privilege, she went in a direction that lacked knowledge of institutional racism, explaining that not only would predominantly White schools benefit from having teachers who are not White, but that she could have a positive influence on racial minority students who "might have prejudice against White people and need role models [who are] White." Though Jane's comment may have been well intentioned, it demonstrated that she lacked awareness about her privilege and power as a White teacher. Similarly, Erica minimized race when talking about certain students in her class who fail to respect her: "there are certain kids that—and they're all boys and they're all—I don't know, really tall I guess—I don't know, but sometimes it just seems like—[it's] not so much a racial issue, but it's just kind of like, 'What am I going to learn from this girl? She's young…my teacher is older.'" It is clear that race factors into how Erica perceives these students, but she is hesitant to admit that race may play a role in her relationship with them.

Participant reactions to coursework and experiential learning. When I started to ask questions about the participants' preparedness to teach in a racially diverse classroom, I began to see two clear themes related to the structure and requirements of the Elementary Education Program: fatigue and frustration in learning about diversity, and a request for more experiential

learning. Both participants told me that they did not feel fully prepared, and Jane even went on to add that she didn't think she ever would be. Elaborating on this, Erica said,

> "I guess there are definitely ways where I feel like I'd be prepared…[the university has] given us a lot to go off of and just knowing ways and strategies and how to reach out to students that are different…we took a class last year on just cultural differences and including literature in your classes that is multicultural and relates to everyone…we've definitely gotten our fair share of touching on it and knowing how to represent *everyone* in the classroom and…how [to be] effective in that way."

Jane supported this claim as well, telling me that they "do *tons* with race in education and multiple perspectives…everything all day long is about minority perspective, and different socioeconomic perspectives, and different race perspectives, throughout history and currently," adding, "I do feel like I've learned a lot from that I guess." Despite the abundance of coursework related to diversity, it is essential to note that both participants use a tone of annoyance and fatigue and only "guess" that they have learned from these courses. Both participants also made mention of the negative feelings that the majority of their cohort have toward such courses and topics. Though the source of these feelings was never specifically discussed, judging from the context of the interviews it seems as though lessons on diversity often feel repetitive in their content and are not always taught by instructors who present the material in relevant, meaningful, and innovative ways.

Furthermore, where both participants felt even less prepared was in the amount of experience they had received with racial minority students. On this topic, Erica said, "As far as experience goes, I don't know if I'd see myself [as] prepared in that way. I feel like having the experience to do it is definitely so much better than having just the head knowledge…I really haven't had any chances to do lessons that are multicultural or anything like that." More

specifically, Jane discussed her lack of contact with Asian American students and how that would pose a problem if she had Asian American students in her class; she said, “I can learn as much as I want with people telling me, but it’s not until I sit down with that individual student and really try to learn where they’re coming from that I’ll be able to teach them.” Considering that the Elementary Education Program only encompasses the last two years of a student’s college career, there is a limited amount of time available for the university to require certain kinds of classroom experience. Finding a way to help compensate for this, in addition to reforming coursework, could bring about significant improvements in preparing White preservice teachers for racially diverse classrooms.

Participant preparedness and plans for the future. The rest of the interview questions asked the participants to think about the approaches they would use and challenges they would face in teaching a racially diverse classroom. There were three clear themes that surfaced throughout this part of the interview: minimizing race and culture in addressing student learning, perceived inability to relate to racial and ethnic minority students, and White fear. These themes continued to expand the growing disconnect between the amount of diversity coursework and the lack of White preservice teacher preparedness for entering racially diverse classrooms. Just as race was minimized in participants’ teaching experiences and personal identities, it was downplayed again when discussing strategies for teaching racial and ethnic minority students. The idea of viewing each student as an individual with his or her own unique strengths and weaknesses was a clear belief held by both participants that surfaced repeatedly throughout the interviews. In talking about the importance of establishing community within the classroom, Erica said, “I feel like…your classroom as a community kind of reflects how [students] should view others outside of the classroom. So I guess just developing that sense from the beginning that everybody is important and that people learn in different—not even racially or culturally or

whatever—but people learn in different ways." She notes later that what is most important in preparing to teach is "not so much planning for different cultures…but a lot of it is just the way students learn and their abilities, and you have to realize that." Jane placed similar value on this idea on individuality and said, "I think the biggest thing for me that I try to keep in mind is that every student is different and I'll have to adapt to every student, even if it's not the Asian student versus the American born student…Even if I have all White kids in my class, I still have to meet everybody's needs, and that's really challenging." Despite making another explicit reference to Whiteness, Jane still did not demonstrate an understanding of White privilege and power. Both participants placed emphasis on the idea of individuality and adjusting to the needs of each student, while ignoring the powerful presence of societal pressures that make the life experiences of racial minority students different from their White classmates.

Though the presence and influence of race in the classroom was minimized in various ways, race did however have a clear effect on White preservice teachers' disinterest in teaching in urban schools. Without prompting, both teachers made salient the unfavorable reputation of the Chicago Public School District (CPS) as a district that [White] teachers will often try to avoid. This allowed me to ask the participants why they thought such a reputation existed, and what could be done to fix this problem and close the gap between the academic success of inner-city school districts and that of the surrounding suburbs. Despite the abundance of related coursework and the strong belief in focusing on the individual over any kind of racial or ethnic influence, both participants saw race as a factor in why so many White preservice teachers at Illinois choose not to pursue student teaching opportunities or teaching careers in the Chicago Public Schools. One reason for this was the belief that as White individuals they would not be able to relate to their students well enough to do their job well and with ease. When asked whether the challenges

of urban classrooms were related to their identity or were obstacles that the university could help them overcome, Erica said,

> "I think part of it is just—I mean it definitely is based on race and just appearance and just who you are I guess…I feel that if students are African American they're going to respond better to someone who is African American…or just has certain qualities I guess…I definitely think there's nothing you can do about that barrier because I feel like that's always going to be there. Just because kids live in the real world…it's kind of intrinsic that you respond better to people that are like you."

Interestingly, the idea of looking at each student as an individual is almost entirely lost during this part of the interview, having been replaced by larger, blanket statements about what to expect from certain students. Even Jane, who displayed a higher level of confidence in teaching at an urban school, mentioned that lower achieving students are usually minority students, and turned to generalizations to explain some of the challenges she would face: "Kids really do have a lot set against them who live there because it's a really low socioeconomic level and parents aren't home…They have older brothers that are in gangs and they're hearing all these things…I think in the classroom there would be *tons* of challenges that you wouldn't get anywhere else." The tendency to stereotype is something that most often came up during interviews when participants were talking about students of minority races. This seems to indicate that these White preservice teachers have not had enough contact with other races to be able to break down some of these generalizations. While earlier in the interview both Erica and Jane had focused on the importance of thinking about each student individually, it did not take long to realize that racial differences influenced their perception of urban schools. At one point Jane even said that she would "like to hear some good, honest testimonies about CPS" to help counteract the negative things she hears about all the time from colleagues, instructors, and the media.

Another reason why White preservice teachers are likely to avoid urban schools relates back to participants' lack of awareness about White privilege. Recognizing the disadvantages of receiving a lower paying job and a potentially harder to manage classroom, both participants evoked their right as [White] individuals to choose a safe, comfortable living for themselves. Terms such as "obviously" and "naturally" surfaced frequently in describing a [White] teacher's decision to avoid jobs in urban schools. Though both participants said that working in CPS would be a "good experience" that would serve as "good preparation" for future teaching jobs, neither was strongly considering a teaching career in an urban school. Erica explained, "Obviously you're going to go to the school that's going to pay you more, plus you don't have those problems like discipline." Putting the situation in a slightly different light, Jane explained it as being "natural for someone to say 'I want a nice house…I want to live in a community where my children are safe.'" Although both participants were interested in teaching so that they could work with children and make a positive difference in their lives, it was clear that there were limitations to where the participants were willing to go in order to create that difference. They both demonstrated a lack of awareness of the White privilege that allowed them to have so much power in deciding their future.

These limitations were further strengthened by the presence of White fear throughout both of the interviews. Putting it very bluntly, Jane said,

> "I think people are just terrified. I think it's a culture that they *totally* don't understand, and of course there are a lot of dangers in the city…It's terrifying to think of how these schools are going to get better because it's like ever since Blacks were allowed to live anywhere that they—you know, ever since the end of slavery, White people have been terrified to live near them…you had the creation of the suburbs because people didn't want to live where Black people were. And I think that still exists very strongly today."

Erica displayed a sense of fearfulness as well, referring to herself as a "small White girl" and nervously laughing that she wasn't sure "how that would work out in a school like that." Though it is Whites who hold the power to most easily build success in our society, Whites often perceive there to be a kind of danger and control in the hands of racial minorities, specifically African Americans, which further justifies their decision to self-segregate and move into communities where they are most likely to be comfortable and successful. In suggesting how to potentially close the gap between districts, Erica's proposal entailed trying "to make all [of the] schools an equal balance as far as percentages of race…if they're all equal, it's less of a threat to go into the school I'm working in because it is racially balance and it's not overwhelmingly [like] I'm going to be an outsider." Though more diversity throughout school districts is not necessarily a bad suggestion, in this context it points out the fear that Erica has of being the racial minority within the school she teaches at, and brings to light an intriguing belief that the way to improve struggling districts is to ensure that no one school is comprised predominantly of minority races. These displays of White fear lack an understanding of the institutional racism that cannot be eliminated through the avoidance of urban schools by White teachers or the mixing of races within struggling schools.

Discussion

From the results of this study it appears that White preservice teachers feel unprepared to work in racially diverse classrooms and lack a critical understanding of the privilege and power they hold as members of the dominant race in our society. This supports much of the existing literature on White preservice teachers, which suggests that changes in coursework and increases in experiential learning are necessary in preparing a predominantly White teaching force for an increasingly diverse society. Though participants reported that diversity is frequently incorporated into textbooks, lectures, and class assignments, it is clear that current coursework is

not enough to combat the fears and misconceptions that White preservice teachers have about teaching in racially diverse classrooms. Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly minimized the influence of race and culture in the classroom and failed to demonstrate complete multicultural competency, which the literature defines as including knowledge, awareness, and skills (Spanierman et al., in press). These findings also support the literature on White racial awareness and the importance of understanding how racism still affects our society. Participant responses provided further documentation for the existence of racial color-blindness, as participants consistently lacked awareness of institutional racism and more often considered the effects of race on an individual level (Neville, 2009). Despite the discussion of racial diversity in education courses, participants were still left with an "us" versus "them" mindset (McIntyre, 1997) that left them feeling disconnected from struggling racial minority students. Participants viewed their decision to avoid urban schools as "natural" and justified, which further demonstrated White privilege by their choosing to defend the status quo and reject the choice they have in helping to maintain or close the racial divide (Lewis, 2003).

In future studies it would be important to interview a much larger sampling of preservice teachers, including those who are most interested and most opposed to teaching in urban schools, and those who are not a part of the White majority. Although the two participants in this study seemed to adequately represent the "average" White preservice teacher in the program, it would now be interesting to interview the preservice teachers whom the participants mentioned as having stronger opinions on where they planned on teaching and about the topic in general. Additional insight could also be gathered through interviews with new teachers who recently graduated from Illinois and have only been teaching for one or two years. It would be beneficial to determine what kinds of experiences and coursework led certain preservice teachers to careers in urban districts, while leading others to more suburban or rural communities. The findings on

this and future studies could have important implications for the university, suggesting that education courses embrace a sociocultural approach (Adams et al., 2008) and provide more comprehensive exposure to racially diverse classrooms, including greater encouragement to work in Chicago Public Schools.

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Appendix A

- “What made you want to become a teacher?”
- “Are you presently student teaching? Is this your first experience doing so?”
- “What school are you teaching at? Could you tell me a little about the students (age, gender, racial background, etc.)?”
- "Could you tell me where you would most like to teach after you graduate and what factors or reasons make you want to teach there?"
- "Have you thought about how your personal identity, such as your race or gender, may influence your effectiveness as a teacher?"
- "Overall, do you feel prepared to meet the needs of a racially diverse student body? If so, what has prepared you? If not, why do you feel unprepared?"
- "Have you considered ways in which you can create a multicultural environment in your classroom?"
- "Do you think there would be challenges in teaching a racially diverse classroom? If so, what are some of the challenges you think you may face?"
- “Do you think that some of the challenges are simply related to your identity, or do you think there is something the university could do to help you feel better prepared?”
- “Considering the reputation of Chicago Public Schools and other urban districts as being less desirable places to teach, how do you think we can close that gap that exists between districts when so many well qualified teachers are reluctant to teach in lower paying, less successful schools?”

- “Is there anything else that you would like to add, perhaps something that we didn’t get a chance to talk about or what was it like for you to participate in this interview?”